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SUBJECT: SOMALIA HUMANITARIAN UPDATE: FOOD SECURITY
IMPROVES BUT CHALLENGES REMAIN

REF: Nairobi 00594

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¶1. SUMMARY: Studies show improved food security in south and central Somalia despite continuing conflict. Pastoralists and agro-pastoralists are showing signs of recovery. While the food security situation is also improving for riverine communities, this group remains particularly vulnerable to shocks. USAID's Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) continues to support monitoring of food security and nutrition in south and central Somalia and to work with partners to improve food security and livelihoods of vulnerable populations. Despite reported improvements in food security, many challenges still remain for Somalia. End Summary.

PASTORALISTS BEGIN RECOVERY

¶2. In FY 2006, USAID/OFDA provided \$6.4 million to assist an estimated 1.4 million vulnerable communities affected by drought in south and central Somalia. Since last year, the situation for these populations is improving (REFTEL). USAID-funded UN Food and Agriculture's (FAO) Food Security Analysis Unit (FSAU) and Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) report an improved food security and agriculture outlook for pastoralists and agro-pastoralists.

¶3. FASU and FEWS NET also normal to above normal rainfall through May is expected to continue to replenish water sources and pasture and that agricultural activities are ongoing. Due to a mild dry season and good long rains (April-June), livestock body conditions for all species (cattle, sheep, goat and camel) are improving, milk is available, and animals are reproducing. In addition, livestock prices and exports have increased, improving purchasing power for pastoralists.

¶4. While malnutrition remains a chronic problem in south and central Somalia and Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) rates have not gone below the WHO emergency threshold of 15 percent for the last 12 years, FSAU notes a slight improvement in malnutrition rates in some pastoralist areas. Nutrition assessments conducted by

FSAU and partners in Gedo Region in April 2007 indicate continuing critical malnutrition rates with 16.7 percent GAM reported in the agro-pastoral population and 19.9 percent in the pastoral population. A direct comparison cannot be made to last year's assessment in March 2006, which showed a 23.7 percent GAM, as the study did not disaggregate by livelihood groups. FSAU points out some recovery, however, and expects this improving trend to be similar in other pastoralist areas in south and central Somalia.

RIVERINE COMMUNITIES

15. Despite early signs of improvement among pastoralists and agro-pastoralists, FSAU studies show that riverine communities remain highly vulnerable to shocks as this group was among the most affected by the November/December floods. According to the UN, the flood displaced an estimated 255,000 people, representing more than 80 percent of the population along the Juba and Shabelle rivers. Many lost their assets and crops. Localized flooding during the current long rains could also negatively impact food security, especially in areas still recovering from previous flooding.

16. Nutrition assessments conducted by FSAU in Hiran Region in March 2007 targeting the riverine population show a GAM rate of 18.2 percent. Assessments carried out in similar communities in Gedo Region in April 2007 indicate a GAM rate of 17.7 percent. These rates are consistent with previous years' assessments indicating no recovery for the riverine population in spite of the improved food security situation over the last year. Malnutrition rates are still above the recommended threshold because of persistent poverty, continuing

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conflict, insecurity, limited access to water and healthcare, limited dietary diversity, poor sanitation, and increased exposure to water-borne diseases following recent flooding.

17. Following the floods, however, riverine communities have benefited from limited off-season crops in flood recession areas. FSAU forecasts agricultural production for the current season to be better compared to this time last year. FSAU surveys indicate that ongoing planting, weeding, and further land preparation is creating more employment opportunities.

USAID/OFDA ACTIVITIES

18. USAID/OFDA continues to support FSAU's food security monitoring and ongoing nutritional assessments. After the current long rains, FSAU, FEWS NET, and partners will conduct a long rains assessment which will provide vital information for planning and programming. The results should be available in August. In addition FSAU, through its nutrition surveillance unit (NSU), is conducting ongoing nutrition assessments including surveys specifically targeting IDP populations.

CONCLUSION

19. In spite of marginal improvements in food security, insecurity, piracy, political uncertainty and continual large-scale human displacement means Somalia's worries are far from over.

RANNEBERGER